

Diporiphora winneckei L. & F.

Winnecke's Dragon

Habit slender, head narrow and pointed with sharp canthus rostralis, covered with keeled scales; tympanum moderate. A slight transverse gular fold present or absent. Dorsal scales uniform large, the keels directed to the vertebral line, gular scales almost smooth, ventral scales smooth or feebly keeled; scales on limbs and tail large, more strongly keeled. Tail about $2\frac{3}{4}$ times as long as the head and body, round, tapering. Limbs and digits long with long claws, the adpressed hind limb reaching the neck or tympanum. Pores absent. The largest W.A. specimen measures nearly $7\frac{1}{2}$ in. (190 mm.).

Pale brownish grey with a broad bluish vertebral band and a series of large dark spots on each side divided by a thin white line which extends from the eye over the ear about half way along the back (spirit specimens). Under surface pale with various patterns in thin longitudinal dark lines from the chin to the tail. Tail in one case light with dark spots, in the other, dark with light spots.

Distribution: Originally collected at Charlotte Waters, Central Australia. The two specimens in the W.A. Museum came from Marilla Station, 50 miles from Exmouth Gulf.

(To be continued, with an account of the species of the genus *Amphibolurus*).

THE CATTLE EGRET IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

By C. F. H. JENKINS, M.A., Government Entomologist.

The Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) is a native of the warmer parts of Asia, Africa and southern Europe, but about 25 years ago it suddenly appeared in South America and in the early nineteen fifties made its way to the United States of America.

The history of the bird in Western Australia is somewhat obscure, but it has been well established in the Kimberleys for some time and birds probably referable to this species have been reported from the South-West for the past five or six years. Early in May 1959 Mr. Jim Arbuckle kindly informed me that a dozen unfamiliar, large white birds were tending cattle and horses in a dry swamp on his property at Balcatta, north of Perth. On visiting the area on May 8 I was pleased to see 14 Cattle Egrets closely following the stock around the paddock and darting in to catch flies as they were disturbed by the animals. Since then reports have been received from districts as far apart as Esperance, Ravensthorpe, Bunbury, Bremer Bay, Mt. Barker and Baandee, indicating quite an extensive invasion of the South-West.

In 1933 the Pastoralists' Association advocated the introduction of the Cattle Egret to assist in controlling the tick pest on our Kimberley cattle stations. Twenty birds from India reached the

South Perth Zoo, and 18 were liberated on the Lennard River, at Kimberley Downs Station near Derby. Some birds were killed by hawks; the remainder gradually disappeared and their total loss was presumed.

Nothing more was known of the Cattle Egret in Australia until 1948 when the National Geographic Society-Smithsonian Institute Expedition to the Northern Territory saw hundreds of the birds in Arnhem Land, and collected specimens for the United States National Museum (Petersen, 1954). Since then these egrets have been seen in widely separated parts of Australia and extending as far south as Melbourne. Large rookeries have been located in the Northern Territory (Davies, 1959) and breeding has also been observed in northern New South Wales (Goddard, 1955). Although there has been a suggestion that the Arnhem Land birds were descendants of those liberated in Western Australia (Tarr, 1950) it seems much more likely that they found their way naturally either from New Guinea or Indonesia.

During a trip through the Kimberleys in 1944 I made enquiries from station owners concerning the egrets but could find no suggestion of their survival, and the district veterinary officer associated with the 1933 releases considers the survival theory most unlikely.

The first report of the Cattle Egret from the South-West came in 1953, when a bird fitting its description and habits, was seen by Mr. Carter at Norseman. In 1954 further reports were received from Wanneroo and Queen's Park, but the birds did not stay long and their identity could not be verified. It is too early to interpret the appearance of the Cattle Egret in the South-West as evidence of local migration by the species, but there is some evidence to suggest a regular seasonal movement. Mr. Carter reported that the egret visited his Norseman property three years out of four, arriving each time in April. The 1954 reports at Wanneroo and Queen's Park were in May and the current invasion occurred at the same time of the year.

As much information as possible is required about this new arrival in the South-West and any sight records should be carefully noted. Such information will assist in clarifying the pattern of movement within the State and the rate at which the species is able to colonise its new home.

Fortunately the cattle tick is not established in our South-West and so the Cattle Egrets may be of little practical value to stock owners. Should the birds continue to thrive in the North, however, they may be very useful. The ticks are widespread on many stations, and the large areas concerned, and the difficulty of mustering, mean that dipping and other treatments for tick control which may be practical on a small scale are usually quite out of the question.

The Cattle Egret should not be confused with the White Egret (*Egretta alba*)—often called the "white crane"—which may be seen on swamps and estuaries. This beautiful bird is considerably larger than the Cattle Egret, does most of its feeding in shallow water, and shows no special interest in livestock.

REFERENCES

- DAVIES, S. J. J. 1959. Personal Communication.
GODDARD, M. T. 1955. Notes on the breeding of the Cattle Egret in North-Eastern New South Wales. *Emu*, 55: 275.
PETERSEN, R. T. 1954. A new bird immigrant arrives. *Nat. Geog. Mag.*, Aug.: 281.
TARR, H. E. 1950. The distribution of foreign birds in Australia. *Emu*, 49: 189.

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

A Ring-tail Possum at Midland Junction.—In recent years the Ring-tail Possum (*Pseudocheirus occidentalis*) has become a comparatively rare animal and it is of interest, therefore, to record the capture of a live individual at Midland Junction on February 24, 1958, by Mrs. H. Hudson. The animal first made its appearance at her home, right in the town, a fortnight previously, living on her grapes and sleeping in an old hat on the back verandah. It was a young female, still possessing its milk teeth and I estimated that it was two months out of the parental pouch. The body length was about 4½ in. and the total length about 12 in. The extremely long tail was covered dorsally with fine white fur and below was rat-like. It did not appear to use its tail, as the Brush-tailed Possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) does, for balance, but it could hang by this appendage when compelled. The body was covered with very dense black-brown fur, which was paler ventrally. It did not use its teeth for defence at any time. It fed mainly on fruit juice, bread, flowers and lettuce.

The animal is not caged and is allowed full liberty. It still (April 1959) comes when called and displays marked affection for its foster parents.

—ELIZABETH BAILEY, Nedlands.

Record of Scarlet-chested Parrot.—Although first collected in Western Australia, in the 1840s, the Scarlet-chested Parrot (*Neophema splendida*) was not again observed in the State until 1941 (*Emu*, 54: 280). Two further recent records have been published (Serventy and Whittell, *Handbook*, 1951, p. 233).

In Sept.-Oct., 1956, the writer accompanied Dr. A. R. Main, Dr. Frances Benediet and Mr. R. D. Royce on a University expedition to the Zanthus area. On Sept. 30, while driving a few miles from Coonana, a small parrot which appeared predominantly light blue, flew close to the truck. On walking through the scrub at the spot a small parrot which flew into a dead tree was flushed from dry grass. Dr. Benediet and the writer were able to approach close to the bird, a male Scarlet-chested Parrot, and watch it for some time with binoculars. The following field description was taken down: "deep blue head, scarlet from throat to breast, orangey feathers on thighs, dark green back, blue feathers in wings." As no red was seen on the bird which flew past the truck it was presumed to be a female.

The general habitat was a slope with a sparse short tree and